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Yugoslavia: The Kosovo Problem

A Research Paper

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**Yugoslavia:
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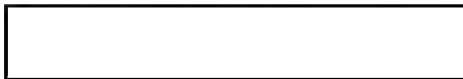
Key Judgments

The future course of Serb-Croat rivalry over the distribution of power in Yugoslavia is a well-acknowledged key to maintaining the integrity of the Yugoslav state in a post-Tito period. The evolution of the less publicized rivalry between Serbs and Albanians within Serbia's Kosovo Province, however, may have an equally important bearing on Belgrade's management of its ethnic minority problems.

Belgrade has attempted in recent years to win the allegiance of its Albanian minority primarily by granting qualified political autonomy and contributing aid intended to reduce the economic gap between Kosovo and the richer northern republics of the federal Yugoslav state. Albanian nationalism, however, continues to grow while Kosovo's economic achievement falls short of Belgrade's promises.

The Hoxha regime in neighboring Albania views Kosovo as only temporarily under Yugoslav control. Improved Yugoslav-Albanian state relations—and Albania's split with its patron, China—have not been accompanied by an amelioration of the hostility between the two Balkan Communist parties and their leaders. Each leadership remains wary of the other's long-term territorial ambition.

While we have no evidence of foreign subversive activity in Kosovo, the situation there is ready-made for foreign meddling. This is particularly true because the Albanian minority problem in Yugoslav Macedonia could unsettle a region against which Bulgaria lays irredentist claims.



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**Yugoslavia:
The Kosovo Problem**

Kosovo's 1 million Albanians are Yugoslavia's poorest people. They have the country's highest birth and illiteracy rates and are the most tied to the land. A heady brand of Albanian nationalism has developed among them, aimed at overcoming the effects of past Serbian rule and based on unrealistic expectations of economic gain. Despite substantial federal aid, the region remains largely underdeveloped; the economic gap between Kosovo and the richer areas of Yugoslavia widens each year. The presence of an independent, Albanian homeland on Kosovo's borders adds a foreign dimension to the problem.

It is against such regional nationalism that Tito has struggled for 34 years in an uphill fight to forge a nation out of constituent ethnic groups steeped in regional prejudices. After Tito has gone, a clash between Serbs and Albanians could touch off volatile nationality disputes elsewhere in the federation; any resurgence of Serbian assertiveness would rekindle opposition among Croats, Muslim-Slavs, and other ethnic groups. Moderation of Kosovo's problems thus could become critical to the Yugoslav federation's survival.

Historical Setting

Both the Serbs and Albanians have deep emotional commitments to Kosovo Province. For the Serbs, Kosovo is the hallowed ground of "old Serbia." The first Serbian Orthodox Patriarchate was established at Pec in 1346, and the province is the site of Serbia's last stand against the Turks in 1389. The largely Muslim Albanians claim that, as descendants of the ancient Illyrians, they are the original inhabitants of the area, while the Slavs are the interlopers.

Belgrade knows the explosive nature of Albanian nationalism in Kosovo. In 1944, for example, Tito's partisans fought an indigenous Albanian Army bent on establishing control over the region. Albanian hostility, always just beneath the surface, erupted again in the late 1960s in the wake of the fall from power of Aleksandr Rankovic, a Serb nationalist, confidant of

President Tito, and overseer of the secret police. Rankovic had played a key role in the sometimes brutal repression of the Albanians, and his departure raised hopes that the door was now open to political and social change. Following an unusually candid debate on the Albanian minority problem at the 6th Serbian Party Congress, well-organized demonstrations broke out on 27 and 28 November 1968.¹ The Albanians' demands—ranging from moderate to far-reaching—included:

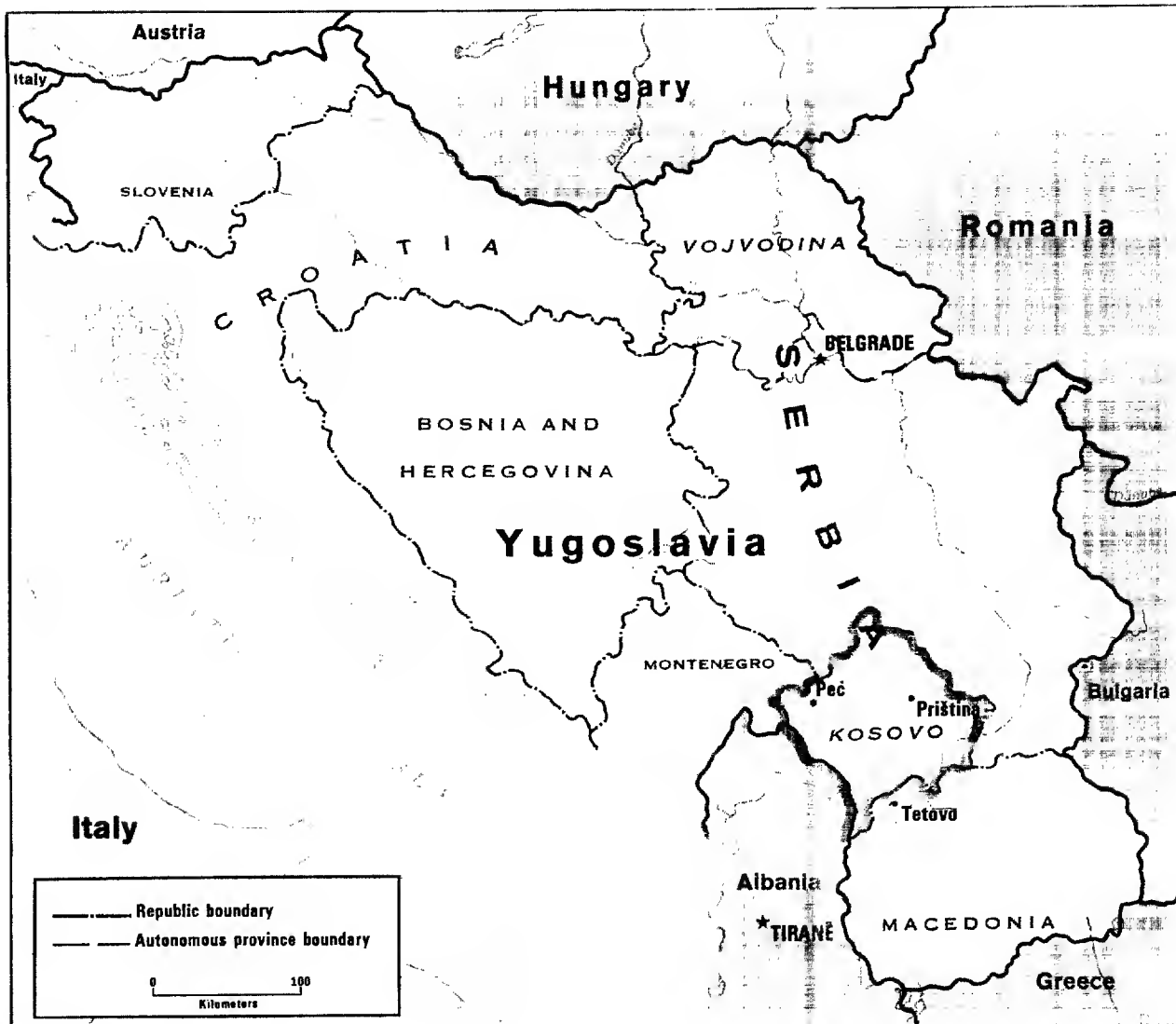
- An end to the "colonization of Kosovo" (an attack on past Serbian dominance).
- The fulfillment of autonomous rights promised during the war.
- The right of self-determination.
- The right to a separate constitution for Kosovo.
- The creation of an Albanian republic within the Yugoslav federal structure.
- The creation of an Albanian university not dominated by Serbs.
- The right to fly the Albanian flag.

The Kosovo demonstrations triggered similar Albanian disturbances in the neighboring Macedonian town of Tetovo on 23 December 1968. Demonstrators called for an end to anti-Albanian prejudice and union with Kosovo.

In 1971, this time buoyed by a resurgent Croatian nationalism, Albanians agitated once again for full republic status for Kosovo. In December 1974, disorders again broke out, centering at Pristina University. Hundreds of arrests were reportedly made, and many persons were jailed for crimes ranging from the distribution of Albanian nationalist leaflets to painting nationalist slogans on university buildings; some slogans called for a "Greater Albania." In the ensuing years, there have been several bloody prison riots among Albanians protesting alleged mistreatment by their Serbian wardens.

¹ 27 November is Albanian National Day and 29 November is Yugoslav National Day; in 1968 the latter date marked Yugoslavia's 25th anniversary.

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Belgrade's Policies and Consequences

Belgrade's response to manifestations of Albanian nationalism has generally been to meet moderate demands and to pour large amounts of development funds into the province. Belgrade has also, however, tended to deal harshly with nationalist agitators, handing out stiff jail sentences to those convicted of voicing extreme programs. [REDACTED]

The effort to defuse the Kosovo problem has met with only limited success. Investments in the province stimulated large-scale migration of unskilled workers into the cities and towns where the promise of employment has been largely unfulfilled. The decision to expand Pristina University, sever its ties to Belgrade University, and lower entrance requirements has produced a pool of semieducated, unemployed malcontents. Crowded living conditions and limited recreation facilities add to discontent at the university, where students have demonstrated a particularly strong penchant for nationalist extremism. Because many militant Serb nationalists lost power and left Kosovo, the sensitivity of those remaining has increased with the growth of their perception of a fundamental threat to their historically dominant position in that province. [REDACTED]

While addressing Albanian demands, both federal officials in Belgrade and local Albanian officials in Kosovo have also kept an eye on Serb nationalism on a national scale. Serb sensitivities stem in part from the role the Serbian Republic played in creating modern Yugoslavia. The Serbs tend to view themselves as champions and guardians of the state, and they point with pride to the fact that it was Serbia which provided the nucleus for the first Yugoslav state in 1918. [REDACTED]

Many Serbs view moves toward greater Kosovo autonomy as attempts to weaken terminally Serbian power and influence in the Yugoslav federation. The problem of containing Serbian chauvinism has been openly debated within the Serbian party, but little has been done to close the deep rift between the Serbs and Albanians. To the contrary, in 1976 Serb nationalists tried unsuccessfully to take away Kosovo's right to represent itself in the federal government. [REDACTED]

The largely Albanian leadership in the Kosovo is acutely aware of Serb sensitivities. Fadil Hodza, the province's representative on the Yugoslav party presidium and state presidency, has repeatedly denounced the more extreme excesses of Albanian nationalism, such as advocating union with Albania. He has stressed that Kosovo Albanians have opted for Tito's Yugoslav federation—in principle a community of equal nations and nationalities. At the local level, however, Kosovo's Albanian leaders are frank and assertive in airing the province's economic grievances and keeping alive hopes of attaining full republic status. [REDACTED]

The Muslim Factor

Given the international resurgence of the Muslim faith and its recent impact on events in Iran, the Yugoslav leadership has a new element to ponder. Belgrade's reactions to periodic foreign allegations about repression of its 3.8 million Muslims suggest a potential problem of at least modest proportions. [REDACTED]

According to the Yugoslav Muslim Supreme Body of Elders, about 1.3 million Albanian and Turkish Kosovars (about 85 percent of Kosovo's population) "live in the texture of Muslim culture and civilization." Another 350,000 Albanian Muslims live in the neighboring Republic of Macedonia. There are 1.7 million more Muslim-Slavs living in the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, but they are divided by geography, race, and a less tenacious attachment to a feudal Muslim culture than their Albanian and Turkish co-believers. For example, blood feuds and bride-selling are still fairly common in Kosovo, but have long ago disappeared among the more modernized Muslim-Slavs. While religious attitudes are an important factor in the attitude of Albanian Muslims in Kosovo toward neighboring Albania, which conducts a virulent atheist policy, Kosovo's Albanian youth appear less attracted than their elders to the religious aspects of the Muslim heritage. This may account for the recent stronger "greater Albania" proclivity among Albanian students in the province. [REDACTED]

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25X1 In any future Albanian nationalistic surge in Kosovo, there probably would be two fringe factions with opposite orientations. One would probably gravitate toward such leading Muslim states as Libya, Iraq, and Kuwait, where most Yugoslav Muslim clergy go for training. The other group, primarily university students, would presumably look to Tirane for inspiration.

Poverty, Ineptitude, and Impatience

25X1 Belgrade will clearly have to devise a new approach to Kosovo's economic problems if the province is to be kept quiet and made loyal to the Yugoslav federal concept. Historically, the region's economic ills have in turn been ignored and then actively—often unwisely—addressed. Until 1956 the local economy was left to its devices, and Belgrade maintained political order through unsympathetic, and often brutal, police measures.

25X1 In the 1957-61 period Kosovo began to receive special economic aid such as that granted to other less developed Yugoslav regions since 1947, but the flow was inadequate to meet Kosovo's needs. Following the purge of Rankovic in 1966, and in keeping with the subsequent acceleration of economic reforms and political decentralization throughout Yugoslavia, Belgrade tried to tackle Kosovo's economic problems head-on. The economic keystone of the new approach was a development program—formalized in 1971—for all the underdeveloped regions—with special emphasis on Kosovo. Development funds and social service subsidies for the program came from taxes levied on the profits of the northern republics at the rate of about 3 percent of their total income. The stated goal was to help the southern underdeveloped regions catch up with the northern part of the country. In Kosovo's case, the program actually delivered \$1.5 billion—one-third of the total supplementary aid package for the south—in the 1970s and substantially raised local expectations.

Population Growth Trends Percent (1947-77)

Yugoslavia 38.8

Yugoslav Republics and Provinces

*Kosovo 107.1

*Bosnia-Herzegovina 61.5

*Macedonia 59.7

*Montenegro 55.0

Serbia 33.5

Slovenia 25.2

Croatia 21.6

Vojvodina 20.9

*Less developed regions

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Economic Aid From Northern to Southern Regions, 1971-75

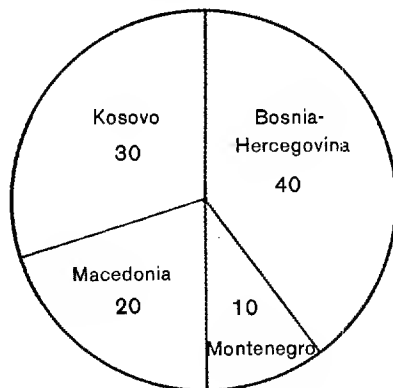
Percent

Total 2.15 Billion US \$

From Each Northern Region



To Each Southern Region



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The program has not made progress toward its ultimate goal of helping Kosovo reach parity with the developed regions, however. In fact, the province is falling behind; its per capita GNP in 1947 was 49 percent of the national average, but only 30 percent in 1978. Since 1975, annual economic growth has averaged only 3 percent in Kosovo—half the rate of the other less developed regions. [REDACTED]

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Responsibility for the failure must be shared by both Belgrade and Kosovo. The federal investments made in the province, mainly capital-intensive industrial projects, were ill-designed to help combat the main long-range problem—unemployment. Worse, the initial investment surge ignored the region's inadequate economic base, for example, roads and communications, with the result that subsequent investments have had to be diverted to these necessary, but low return, projects. [REDACTED]

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The Kosovars themselves have demonstrated an inability to bring new projects on line on schedule or within estimated costs. Shortages of trained technicians and managers as well as general educational shortcomings, exemplified in a 30 percent illiteracy rate, contribute to this inefficiency. Debts in the province are thus very high, and one-third of the industrial work force reportedly is employed by unprofitable enterprises. This inefficiency feeds the natural resistance of the northern regions to contribute to the development fund. [REDACTED]

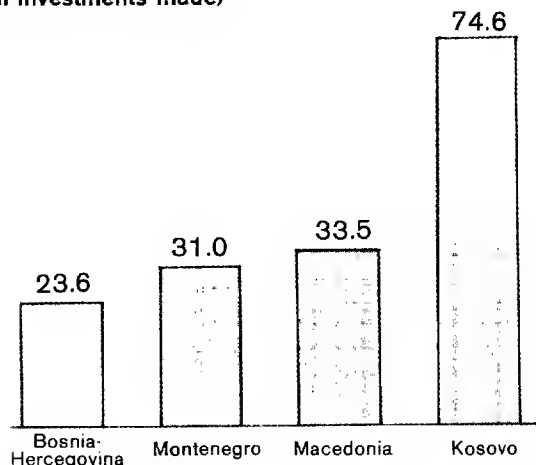
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A paucity of comprehensive data makes it difficult to document the human costs of Kosovo's economic plight; no gross unemployment figures, for example, are published. But it is generally conceded that Kosovo's problem in this critical area is the worst in the country and is not improving. According to a Yugoslav journal, only one in 10 Kosovars is employed. Large families—averaging eight members—limited job opportunities, and primitive living conditions contribute substantially to restiveness. Health programs are far below the national average, with only one doctor per 2,000 residents and a scarcity of adequate hospital facilities. As a result, according to the Belgrade daily *Borba* even basic social services—such as unemployment pay, guaranteed health care—cannot be provided to the majority of Kosovars. [REDACTED]

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Southern Regions: Dependence on Special Development Funds, 1977

(Expressed in percent of total local investments made)



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Kosovo's legacy of underdevelopment probably tends to soften the impact of resentment over unrealized expectations, particularly among older residents. The province's population, however, has doubled since the war; the average age now is in the early 20s. This youthful majority came of age in an era of great expectations, which are now perceived as exaggerated. The outlook is bleak; the continuing population boom leads to doubts that job opportunities will ever expand fast enough for the unemployment situation to improve. Moreover, it is doubtful that the Kosovars will ever be able to join the Yugoslav economic mainstream.

External Factors

Given its problems, Kosovo is clearly ripe for foreign meddling; this adds yet another dimension to Yugoslavia's problem in holding on to the area and better integrating its people into a largely Slavic society.

Albanian Attitudes. Privately viewing Kosovo as a part of Albania only temporarily under Yugoslav control, the Albanian regime's public stand is one of quiet watching and waiting. Disclaiming any intention of interfering in Yugoslav internal affairs, Enver Hoxha's

leadership, nonetheless, openly asserts its right to watch over the Albanian minority in Yugoslavia. Tirane expresses particular concern about the Albanians in Macedonia.

Since the late 1960s—specifically since the 1968 Soviet-led occupation of Czechoslovakia led to a moderation of Albania's most rabid anti-Yugoslav policies—Tirane has developed numerous cultural and economic contacts with Kosovo. The effectiveness of these exchanges, designed to encourage Albanian nationalism and to improve Albania's image in the province, is tempered by Albania's economic backwardness, even compared with Kosovo. In a surprisingly candid conversation with a Western diplomat last December, Albanian Foreign Minister Nesti Nase suggested that Albania's "natural and permanent" aim is to reunite all Albanians into one state. Nase's comments may be a good indication that Tirane hopes to take advantage of the post-Tito era—should the Yugoslav federation begin to come apart—to achieve a greater Albania. The receptivity of some Kosovars to this line stems not only from common nationality, but also from an expectation that, no matter how backward they may be in Yugoslav terms, they would be considered advanced in a greater Albania.

Soviet Attitudes. There are also opportunities for Soviet meddling in Kosovo. A number of those arrested by Yugoslav officials in the April 1974 pro-Soviet party conspiracy were Serbs from Kosovo. Since that time, provincial party leaders have been vocal in warning against the activities of unspecified foreign intelligence services. Their comments clearly imply concern over Albanian and Soviet activity.

The indictment against cominformist leader Vladimir Dapcevic—arrested in 1976—accused him of planning to detach parts of Kosovo and Macedonia from Yugoslavia and give them to Albania. Earlier Soviet support for Dapcevic and his followers after they had originally fled Yugoslavia in 1958—initially to Albania and from there eventually to the USSR—is well documented. Now, in the wake of the Sino-Albanian rift, Moscow has renewed overtures toward Tirane. No matter how remote rapprochement between the two may be, Belgrade sees a renewed threat of Soviet-Albanian collusion to be at Yugoslavia's expense.

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